

Headhunters

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Summary: Two Spartan-IIIs find themselves on a wild red planet with a strange mission- not the normal assassination or generalized mayhem they're so good at, but rather the recovery of a mysterious artifact called an 'Index'... One-shot, maybe continued later.

Headhunters

Planet A-4

System 5490

August 22, 2552, 23:12 hours

Seventeen hours after insertion

Spartan D-401, Roland, smirked as he edged his body a little deeper into the thick underbrush of the area and watched the Covenant encampment below. His crimson armor should have stood out against the plant life, save for the fact that A-4 didn't have Earth-normal plant life; ONI had told him during the briefings on the way in that A-4's eco-system was adapted to its star and to the harsh environment.

The plant growth used chemosynthesis instead of photosynthesis, and was hence a dark red color, dark red against the dark brown of the dirt and the harsh grey-black of the sky, perpetually lit by lightning. ONI had told him that he and his brother, Spartan D-098, Samuel, had just forty hours to get in and get out before the rains of sulfuric acid would come pounding down, reducing Spartans, armor, and weaponry into unidentifiable goo.

The Covenant were down there, all right, a dozen Brutes watching over a few hundred Grunts and about thirty Jackals- they even had a single Wraith parked down there to help defend against any kind of UNSC interference. For an instant, Roland missed his old SPI (Semi-Powered Infiltrator) armor; its stealthy photo-panels would make stealing

that Wraith a breeze, and he could use it to turn the covenant into glass.

Of course, SPI armor had nothing on the MJOLNIR system- his new armor featured a hardened uplink to the UNSC Prowler Solitaire and a suite of sensors to help analyze his environment, otherwise known as HESA; Hardened Electronic Sensor Array-External. A Command Network Module, CNM, helped coordinate Roland with Samuel as well as any other friendly UNSC forces in the area over vast distances. The MJOLNIR also featured shields, a critical addition that would allow him to withstand forces that would have killed him a dozen times over in SPI armor.

Opening a channel on his secure COM, Roland contacted his brother. "Sam, do you see what I see down there?"

Sam's voice, hard and quiet, came back immediately. Sam had been a standout during training, but as time went by he got quieter and quieter. "I see it, Roland. I can kill four of the Brutes within eight seconds, but that's still a lot of Covenant hardware running around down there."

Roland nodded. "Agreed, Sam, but we can't let them have whatever they're looking for. If we kill the Brutes, the Grunts will run, and the Jackals can be neutralized fairly easily. As long as we keep that Wraith out of the game, we should be fine." As he spoke, Roland calmly pulled his M319 Individual Grenade Launcher from the magnetic clamps on his back and checked the mechanism. Satisfied that he was ready to fire, he leveled the launcher, carefully gauging the distance to the open hatch on the Wraith. "Ready, Sam?"

"Ready, Roland. On your cue," Sam, as ever, was calm and quiet, snuggled into his S2AM Sniper Rifle on the ridgeline above Roland.

Gauging the angle once more, Roland smiled broadly and sent the grenade on its way with a deep thoomp. It arced high through the air, and fell neatly into the open hatch of the Wraith. For a long second, nothing happened, until the grenade detonated, causing a catastrophic explosion that blew the tank apart in a spectacular burst of flame and destruction.

The Covenant camp kicked into a frenzy of desperate action, trying to figure out what had happened. Roland quickly re-positioned himself; launching a second grenade which blew apart a group of Jackals crouched behind their shields. The Brutes began shouting orders, and the rest of the aliens began to respond until the lead, a big bastard in gold armor, had his head explode under precise fire from Sam's weapon. Three more brutes fell within seconds, and four more fell as soon as Sam had reloaded. Having spent so long in one place, Sam began to move, making sure the enemy couldn't zero in on his position. "Neat trick with the grenade, by the way, Roland," he said, his voice whispering over the link as he ran.

Roland laughed quietly and aimed another grenade. "Ta, brother;" he replied, and launched the weapon. It arced over a knot of grunts and blew a surprised Brute to shreds. Roland reloaded, and launched one more grenade- it arced out and shattered a Covenant energy container, and killed the last of the Brutes along with a few Jackals and half-a-dozen Grunts. The remaining Covenant began to break,

encouraged by Sam's rifle.

Seeing the coast was, for the moment, clear, Roland charged down into the camp, returning the M319 to the clamps on his back and pulling the M6D pistol. It felt good in his left hand, as it always had, ever since the days of his first contact with the Covenant. Moving through the camp, Roland looked for what he had been sent to recover- the Covenant here had located some sort of Index, something that would activate a weapons system that could exterminate Humanity. The Covenant camp contained only a few shacks, so his hunt was going to be a short one.

Circling the largest shack, Roland came up behind a Jackal that was searching the darkness around it with a needle rifle. Without hesitation, Roland's hand snaked out, wrapping around its throat. With his right hand, Roland severed the creature's spinal cord with a single swift stroke of his combat knife. Throwing the alien away, Roland turned and ducked inside the shack.

Inside, darkness was lightened only by the glow of a few arcane Covenant machines and, on a pedestal in the center of the room, by a metallic T-shaped object that glowed a painfully bright white and rotated slowly, suspended over the pad. Reaching out carefully with his right hand, Roland grasped the artifact and pulled it toward him. He winced as a flash of light forced his eyes almost closed, and the image of a tall, featureless humanoid in a white robe in a vast room filled with shelves. The figure slowly raised its hands, spreading its arms.

As abruptly as the vision appeared, it was gone. Roland opened his Mission COM, connected to the _Solitaire_ and to Sam all at once. "Attention, all hands; mission accomplished, precious cargo retrieved; proceeding to extraction point, e.t.a. approximately fifty minutes."

Sam double clicked his COM to acknowledge the transmission, and _Solitaire's_ _Captain_ followed suit. With a final look at the artifact, Roland slipped it into his pack, just above his hips, and began to fall back, disappearing into the darkness. He had the strangest feeling in his gut, a feeling he'd only had when Sam or another Spartan had needed him. Almost of their own will, his legs carried him forward into a run- this was no time for sight-seeing.

End
file.